

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now go into executive session to consider the nomination of Rodney E. Slater, of Arkansas, to be Secretary of Transportation.

NOMINATION OF RODNEY E. SLATER OF ARKANSAS TO BE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

Mr. HUTCHINSON. Mr. President, I yield myself 5 minutes from the time allocated to Chairman MCCAIN.

Mr. President, last week I had the opportunity to speak before the Commerce and Environment and Public Works Committees on behalf of my good friend and our nominee for Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater. I am proud today, and honored today to be able to rise before the entire Senate body and once again voice my support for the President's choice for Secretary of Transportation.

I have known Rodney Slater since the 1980's, when I was first elected to the Arkansas State House of Representatives and Rodney was the executive assistant for then Governor Bill Clinton. From the very beginning of our relationship, I had the deepest respect for Rodney on both a personal and professional level.

Professionally, I think there is no question whatsoever that he is qualified to become the Secretary of Transportation. Before coming to Washington, Rodney served for 6 years as commissioner and later chairman of the Arkansas State Highway Commission. During this time, Rodney, without hesitation, tackled the great challenge of improving a poor rural State's infrastructure. He took on that challenge, not just trying to please, but trying to do the right thing. Arkansas, like most of our States, is a very diverse place with many competing regions. Rodney, though he hailed from the delta, was always fair to every part of the State of Arkansas. I think that is a preeminent qualification for somebody who is going to be Secretary of Transportation of the United States. He will be fair with all modes of transportation. He will be fair to all parts of our Nation.

In the last 4 years, Rodney has served as Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration, where he has faced the demands of implementing ISTEA. As you know, hearings on the reauthorization of ISTEA will begin next week. We will be dealing with some of the most important and complicated issues of transportation when we consider this vital piece of legislation. Rodney's experience with national and local transportation needs as well as his expertise in the intricacies of ISTEA give me great confidence he will be able to work with Congress

in a manner that will help us form legislation that will not only be fair but will address the Nation's pressing transportation needs into the 21st century. Certainly I look forward to working with a Secretary of Transportation who brings hands-on experience to the Department.

On a personal note, I cannot adequately express my esteem for Rodney, for the courage he has shown in overcoming a childhood of deprivation. He is a native of Marianna, AR, the Mississippi Delta region, one of most impoverished of our Nation. Many children grow up in those conditions and find that poverty overcomes them. They never come close to reaching their full potential. Rodney serves, I believe, as a role model for countless Americans who pull themselves up from poverty to make the American dream a reality. If you judge a person from what they overcome, then Rodney Slater has overcome a lot, and should be esteemed. He has not only benefited his own life, but the lives of those he has touched through his selfless public service. His experience in the region of the world he came from, I think, gives him a unique perspective of the value of our Nation's infrastructure and the role it plays in economic development.

Another one of the great things about Rodney, which I have expressed many times, is his commitment to his family. Nobody could question that after watching the confirmation hearings. Several of his family members came there at each time.

I want to reiterate my comments from last week. I have no hesitancy whatsoever in giving my support for Rodney Slater to be Secretary of the Department of Transportation. I believe the President made a fine choice and I look forward to casting my vote for that confirmation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. HOLLINGS. The distinguished Senator from Arkansas has been so laudatory, I think the RECORD should show that Rodney Slater is a Democrat.

The fact of the matter is, he has strong, strong bipartisan support because he truly comes as an appointment, not on account of the color of his skin, but the content of his character. As the distinguished Senator pointed out, he started in the most humble Mississippi Delta section of Arkansas, attended the public schools, graduated, then, from Eastern Michigan University, and then from the University of Arkansas School of Law at Fayetteville.

Working as a commissioner on the Arkansas Highway Commission, he then was able to serve as its chairman and came here just almost 4 years ago as the Federal Highway Administrator. You only have to go to Northridge, CA, to ask how he did. Right after that earthquake out in California, Mr. Slater cut through all the bureaucracy.

His actions there, instituted immediately, facilitated the provision of alternative transportation, and then Mr. Slater's FHWA allowed the repair and rebuilding of the damaged highways out there in record time.

He has become familiar with all modes of transportation, working at DOT—the civilian airline system; all the railroads, including the Nation's rail passenger service, Amtrak; the water borne transportation system, and everything else. So he is totally familiar with it. I don't know any better compliment than that related by my distinguished colleague from Arkansas. Mr. Slater appeared with the strongest bipartisan support of any nominee I have seen in my time up here, and I think he deserves it. I have watched him over the past 4 years, as I have watched other Federal Highway Administrators, but none has done a more resourceful job, a more understanding job, and a more effective job than Rodney Slater of Arkansas.

It's quite a journey from those rural roots to being chairman of the Arkansas State Highway Department to administering the Nation's highway program and now, I hope, to Secretary of Transportation. Mr. Slater's journey began with a loving family and community, and we should, as he does, pay tribute to them. They instilled in him the thirst for education, the drive to succeed at every job, and the determination to be fair in whatever he did. These are qualities that we should look for in every nominee for every office. But in addition to Mr. Slater's personal story there are several other excellent reasons for confirming Mr. Slater in this very important Cabinet position.

He has high-level experience in transportation dating back to 1987. Mr. Slater has served as a member of the Arkansas State Highway Commission and later as the commission chairman. In these positions he received high praise for his ability to bring together diverse interests in order to get the job done. Part of Mr. Slater's success is attributed to his willingness to listen to disparate points of view and a desire to learn from others.

Mr. Slater was appointed to the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA] by President Clinton in 1993. As Administrator, Mr. Slater managed a \$20 billion annual budget in an agency with 3,500 employees and an office in every State. In that capacity, he impressed both local officials and Members of Congress with his ability to work within the system to get things done. During the last 4 years the FHWA under Mr. Slater has expanded our Nation's highways and linked isolated communities to new jobs and opportunities.

One important example of this nominee's abilities is the response of the FHWA to the devastating earthquake that took place in Northridge, CA. Mr. Slater received high marks from those who witnessed his ability to cut red-tape and lessen response time so that critical funds would be released